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ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy--guidance in the solution of personal problems through selected reading--has medical, social, and educational applications. Ancient libraries bear inscriptions implying the recognition of the value of bibliotherapy. From the nineteenth century, medical and educational people have utilized bibliotherapy in working with a number of problems. However, even though bibliotherapy can be a great aid as a preventive measure and in personal problem solving and social adjustment, there are few bibliotherapy courses taught in colleges in the United States. In designing a course in bibliotherapy it must first be decided whether the course should be restricted to those in the medical field or broadened to include other professionals who have the necessary book knowledge, psychology, sensitivity, and awareness. A bibliotherapy course should follow certain principles: the theoretical aspects must be functionally developed, the practitioner must develop a familiarity with the literature to be recommended and with ways of using the techniques of suggestion and persuasion, the reading of literature must be followed by a discussion of its contents, and it must be realized that bibliotherapy is not a panacea nor an alternative to other good healing techniques. (A bibliography and suggestions for course content are included.) (TJ)

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BIBLIOTHERAPY: AN OVERVIEW

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In recent years, much interest has been generated in therapeutic reading-bibliotherapy. Moody and Limper (1973) stated in Bibliotherapy Methods and Materials that

> There is currently mounting stress upon all aspects of mental health in both the public and private sector, which has resulted in an interest in therapeutic reading on the part of librarians, educators, physicians, social workers, psychologists, and all members of the community associated in any way with guiding any aspect of interpersonal relationship.

This interest has given rise to several key questions. What specifically is bibliotherapy? Why is it useful? Who should have access to knowledge about it? What should a course in bibliotherapy include? This article will attempt to deal with these important questions in a manner that is both practical and valuable to those concerned with helping children and adolescents become happy well-adjusted individuals, develop maturity, and sustain mental health.

Definition

The definition of bibliotherapy seems to fall into three broad classifications--medical, social, and educational. Basically, Webster's Third International Dictionary (1976) defines bibliotherapy as "guidance in the solution of personal problems through selected readings." Medically, selected readings are used by medical personnel to help patients solve their emotional and other problems. Socially, bibliotherapy is a useful adjunct to the counseling and guidance used by social workers to help clients successfully adjust to their environment. Educationally, classroom applications of bibliotherapy include selected readings used by educators to change learner attitudes and behaviors, and influence total development.

Simply stated, bibliotherapy is solving problems through directed reading of books followed by subsequent discussion with a doctor, teacher, librarian, etc. Obviously there is much overlap among each of these broad areas--as well there should be--since current thinking stresses the fact that bibliotherapy should be controlled by trained librarians working with a team involving a physician, social worker, occupational therapist and/or a nurse.

History

The concept of bibliotherapy is not a new one. Ancient library buildings bear such inscriptions as "The Healing Place of the Soul," "Food for the Soul," "Medicine for the Mind," and "Resting Place of the Soul." The early nineteenth century saw many physicians recommending books for the emotional difficulties of the mentally ill. Medical staffs often viewed books as a "pharmacy for the mind" (Rongione, 1972). Important people such as the Drs. William and Karl Menninger furthered the use of bibliotherapy by fostering the growth of the library at the Menninger Clinic. At this same time the first organized hospital libraries appeared. World Wars I and II helped to improve library services to the armed forces and the veterans hospitals. In 1962 an entire issue of Library Trends was devoted to the topic of bibliotherapy. Work in bibliotherapy progressed through the 1960s in such areas as drug addiction, fear, attitudinal changes, moral maturity, death, and all exceptionalities. Recent years have seen bibliotherapy advance into both educational and psychosocial areas, while increased interest in therapeutic reading has been fostered by rapidly proliferating and varied publications.

Need for a Course in Bibliotherapy

A search of selected undergraduate and graduate catalogues revealed few courses in bibliotherapy in colleges on the east coast. In fact, one authority stated that there were very few such courses in the United States (Rongione, 1978). This is unfortunate in view of the fact that bibliotherapy can do much to help both children and adults. For example, through reading appropriate books, an individual can gain knowledge about the psychology and physiology of human behavior.

> One of the ways such guidance can be given is through suggestion for recreational reading in which the (client) may receive mental and emotional therapy through identification with a character in a book who faced a problem or situation similar to the (client's) own problem or situation (Lindahl & Koch, 1952).

Furthermore, although much has been said about using bibliotherapy for healing or curative purposes, it must not be forgotten that it can also be used as a preventive measure. As far back as 1938 Rosenblatt stated

> It may help to prevent the growth of neurotic tendencies through the vicarious participation of the reader in the lives of others. The guilt-possessed or rebellious adolescent may come to understand himself better and may learn to perceive the value of his own environment.

More recently, Reynales (1978) stated that "As an aid in personal problem-solving and in social adjustment, bibliotherapy might well be employed in helping young people to meet the many developmental tasks of adolescence." She went on to say that it is unfortunate that bibliotherapy has been so "under-valued for its preventive powers." She quoted Hanna (1970), "Few would disagree that growth toward maturity is the ultimate aim of reading, especially growth in the ability to understand oneself and others and to face and solve social problems with some effectiveness,"

to underline the fact that one of the many duties of English teachers and librarians is reading guidance for young people. Finally, Hanna (1970) stated that it is important to "help young people learn how to solve their own problems and the problems of society with intelligence and wisdom." Reynales listed as areas of concern for preventive bibliotherapy--physical appearance, relationship with one's family, peer group relationships, relations with the opposite sex, love, marriage, old age, vocational goals, war, and racial friction. She felt that there are many books in existence for "concerned bibliotherapists in concerned educational institutions to use in helping students" (Hanna, 1970).

Nature of a Course in Bibliotherapy

When designing a course, one basic question which must be considered is whether "bibliotherapy must be restricted to its use in the medical field, or whether it may also include skillful reading guidance by a librarian or other non-medical person with the necessary background of book knowledge, psychology, sensitivity, awareness or perception" (Brown, 1975). There seems to be a difference of opinion as to who ought to be able to receive instruction. The use of "therapy" implies expertise and most certainly prerequisites ought to be established.

Courses would probably be most relevant for the following professionals: teachers, librarians, social workers, nurses, physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, counselors, and guidance specialists.

A course designed to meet the needs of these diverse professional groups should follow certain principles (Zaccaria & Moses, 1968). First, the theoretical aspects of bibliotherapy must be functionally developed.

The practitioner must understand how theory and practice go together. Second, the practitioner must develop at least a general familiarity with the literature he/she will be recommending. Instruction dealing with adolescent and children's literature would help meet this need. Third, the practitioner must learn how to use the techniques of suggestion and persuasion, rather than prescription, when indicating what books a client should read. A major part of the value of bibliotherapy lies in the client's voluntary participation. Fourth, the reading of the literature by the client must be followed by a discussion of its contents as well as appropriate counseling. This helps to insure that the client obtains the maximum value from the book. Fifth, the reading ability of the client must be considered when the practitioner is deciding on whether or not he should use bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy appears to be more effective with individuals of average and above average reading ability. Finally, although bibliotherapy is a useful technique, it must be realized that it is not a panacea, nor an alternative to other good techniques. Rather, bibliotherapy is an adjunct to many other types of healing relationships.

In summary, having courses available in bibliotherapy would prove useful to those individuals who are interested in using books as a preventive measure or cure for numerous and varied problems. To be more specific, bibliotherapy could be used within the framework of normal classroom curriculum (K-14) to develop character, morals, attitudes, and self-image. It could be used with the maladjusted and mentally ill, with the handicapped, with disadvantaged and adult illiterates, with alcoholics and child and drug abusers, with the physically ill in preparation for a hospital stay, and with juvenile delinquents. Since bibliotherapy can be an effective technique

that could prove useful in many different areas of specialization, it is hoped that more institutions of higher learning will make this information available to those interested, qualified professionals who desire it. There is much to be gained!

For those readers who wish to develop a course in bibliotherapy, the following sources (in addition to the principles already developed) will be especially helpful.

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Zaccaria, Joseph and Harold Moses. Facilitating Human Development through Reading: The Use of Bibliotherapy in Teaching and Counseling. Champaign, Illinois: Stipes, 1968.

A course in bibliotherapy ought to be based on the needs of its students, however, the course content might include the following where relevant.

A. Definition of bibliotherapy.

B. History of bibliotherapy.

C. Rationale for bibliotherapy--its importance and significance.

D. Qualities and assets of the bibliotherapist.

E. Interpretation of at least five case histories; summarization of information therein; identification of needs; identification of books to be used as therapy.

F. Therapeutic uses of bibliotherapy.

G. Dynamics and operative principles of bibliotherapy.

H. Research studies.

I. Problems of bibliotherapy. (Possible adverse effects)

J. Selective annotated bibliography.

K. Guest lecturers.

L. Program planning.

M. Creation of original reading materials.

N. Need for an interdisciplinary approach.

O. Power of books.

P. Practicum in one's own area.

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